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The details, exceptions, and qualifications not specified in a previous article published in the December 1966 Newsletter on the study of foreign culture as an alternative to the required study of literature in advanced levels of foreign language instruction are supplied. For a related document see FL 001 069. (AF)

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Literature? No Literature?

A REBUTTAL

by ELTON HOCKING, Purdue University

I welcome the Editor's invitation to reply to the questions which she appended to my address (*Northern California FL Newsletter,* December 1966), and to Professor Polt's letter on the same page. Discussion is good; let's have more of it.

Ranging over several topics, I generalized and failed to specify details, exceptions and qualifications. By supplying them now, I trust that certain misunderstandings will be overcome.

LITERATURE? NO LITERATURE?

asks Dr. Ross. No such dilemma was intended, for surely it is false; I have always assumed that literature is an essential part of the culture which it represents. I assumed also that we teach literature whenever we can successfully do so, according to the appropriateness of the selection itself in relation to the ability of the students to appreciate it.

However I question the definition of literature as "the country as seen from the point of view of the writer;" likewise the inference that the teaching of literature is tantamount to the teaching of culture. A given work may involve some, or many, or almost none of the national traits: the ethos of Racine's *Phèdre,* for example, was considered by the critic Brunetière to be more Greek than French. Indeed one can make a good case for the thesis that the great classics, of whatever nation, are such by reason of their universality — they are of all men, of all times and places.

FOREIGN HANDSHAKING

and tourist pictures were not advocated by me, contrary to Mr. Polt's implication. My concern was not with trivialities, but with the understanding of another people and their way of life, as outlined in the "MacAllister Report": dominant values, key assumptions, art forms, social institutions, adaptation to geography and climate, attitudes toward foreigners, prevalent types, or characteristics of personality structure.

Similar subjects, although with varying treatments, may be taught to children, also.

> Let foreign languages be introduced, along with some information about foreign lands and peoples, in all American kindergartens and elementary schools... Who will undertake to measure the opening of minds, the changing attitudes toward other peoples, which result from the experiencing of another language and culture?
>
> ...The issue basically is whether or not a foreign language teacher should, in the early stages of language learning, be teaching *something* of the foreign culture. Any of you who think he should *not* are a bit late in speaking up, for your profession has long been claiming knowledge of a foreign culture as one of the great values of language study... The FL Program early assumed that teaching something of a foreign culture is a legitimate aim of language study... (*The Language Curtain,* MLA 1966, 115, 163, 182)

The NDEA Institutes regularly include a course in culture or civilization. The large departments in our colleges have generally done so for the last 40 years. Several years ago Hayward Keniston, past president of the MLA, said in an address to deans of liberal arts colleges: "Language study in the past has been oriented almost exclusively toward literature. Now it must orient itself toward the *total culture* of the people, which would of course include literature."

Evidently, distinguished leaders of our profession see no danger of "intellectual charlatanism and mediocrity." Doubtless they do not expect us to become authorities in the relevant fields, but they do assume that we are humanists — not merely specialists.

LEARNING BY SEEING

A picture may or may not be "worth a thousand words," but the bisensory combination of a well-chosen picture and the appropriate *spoken* words (in the FL, of course) is dramatic and memorable, while the corresponding printed words are merely expository. From documentary films and filmstrips to the cinema as an art form, audio-visual presentations provide a vicarious *experience of* the foreign life, as opposed to mere *knowledge about* it. Both are the common patrimony of a given society; both are reflected in its literature. Our students, however, must acquire this foreign patrimony as a prerequisite to an authentic literary experience. The Junior Year Abroad is of course our best device; next best is to bring the foreign country into the classroom by means of films from abroad. This can be done at all levels of instruction.

The literary experience is no less dependent on the prerequisite of language. "Linguistic competence" is a term as tricky as "reading knowledge." In the words of Professor Edgar Dale:

> There is a vast difference between the *skill* of reading, in which we concentrate on what the book "says," and the *art* of reading, which enables us to discover what the book meant to the author and at what it now means to us. Three levels are involved: reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines. It is this third phase that is so often neglected. (Abridged from *OSU Newsletter,* December 1966)

Dale is criticizing the high school student's inability to read simple prose in his native language. This is a common complaint, even at the college level, and it should temper our impatience to plunge students prematurely into literary readings — to try, as Parker puts it, to eat our cake before we have it. Here lies the danger of wishful thinking, of self-deception, and perhaps even "intellectual charlatanism and mediocrity."

A full awareness and control of simple, denotative prose usage, as such, is necessary for the recognition and appreciation of stylistic effects. Yet these seem to require footnotes for the student at a relatively advanced level: Dostert's *Cours Avancé* provides 28 *explications du texte,* 21 *explications de style;* and 11 *notes supplémentaires,* also on style, for a three-page excerpt from Maupassant's "La Ficelle," which is commonly read in intermediate classes. It would seem that such classes might well postpone "La Ficelle" in favor of simple expository material.

> During my graduate school days I witnessed a striking incident: an English seminar solemnly voted high honors to an unidentified poem which glittered with alliteration, internal rhyme and similar tricks of the trade. The instructor then proceeded systematically to demolish it as the "utter nonsense" which it was. More recently Professor Leon Roudiez of Columbia University lamented the obtuseness of his graduate students when they encounter French verse.

To summarize:

1. Linguistic awareness and skill in reading are best developed by a thorough apprenticeship in the reading of expository writings. The transition to imaginative works can be timed by the teacher's answer to the persistent question: "What proportion of the literary values will my students appreciate, as compared with the reading of a professional translation?"

2. The prerequisite linguistic and cultural apprenticeship can be facilitated by imported audio-visual materials which provide a vivid experience of the foreign language and life. This apprenticeship will equally serve the college non-major in his several subjects; more importantly, it will stimulate all language students to continue, in post-school life, their experience of the foreign culture.

SHAKESPEARE AND THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM

"Is Shakespeare out, too?" asks Mr. Polt. Not for the APP students, but for most of the others the answer is: "Yes, way out." Yet I have seen high school sophomores

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catch fire for *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth,* thanks to seeing stage performances by a superior troupe. Similar results can be had from the excellent filmed performances, many of them by first-rank British actors, but alas, those films are seldom used.

A recent document from the USOE reports that "many [state] supervisors question whether a prescribed APP in literature for the few is as desirable as advanced courses planned to meet the needs and interests of all groups of students."

Here is the nub of the problem. Mr. Polt is apparently concerned with "the few" whose gifts enable them, as he rightly says, soon to appreciate great works of literature. My concern is with the many, who require a considerable apprenticeship in the language and culture. The few go on to college, in any case, and continue their FL there; the many never reach Level III, as matters now stand.

Dare we tolerate this situation? Parker recently warned: "The present popularity of language teachers is basically illusive; it can disappear as dramatically and unexpectedly as it appeared." (*MLJ,* October 1966, Foreword.) But transcending our professional interest is the national interest, which calls for a widespread knowledge of foreign language and cultures.

We must enter the mainstream of education by making our subject relevant to the needs and interests of the many — that is, the needs and interests of our society. *Such is the purpose, surely, of California's unique three-year requirement in the intermediate grades.* Here is a great opportunity to break the bonds of our scholastic tradition, and to demonstrate the essential *humanitas* of our subject.

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